



into her upturned face and remarked so that she alone could hear:

"It's fine, little girl! Count on me to do my part!"

She gave him a look of gratitude and admiration which made his ears tingle with cousinly pride. Gad! some women were splendid creatures!

"Will you truly help?" she said quickly. "Then go down to some of those girls who haven't anybody to talk to at the moment. Never mind if you haven't met them. Everybody's supposed to know everybody else, and besides you're helping me to receive, you know."

He instantly started to do her bidding. When fairly down the lawn he paused to discover some disconsolate and unattended maiden whom he might rescue from the depths of loneliness by throwing her, as he mentally expressed it, a lifeline of small talk.

Before he had proceeded ten yards he spied her,—a girl standing alone by a garden seat, who smiled with doubtful shyness as he approached, the little dimple in her chin showing white as her cheeks grew pink. She was tall for a girl so young, and of maidenly slenderness. Her white hat was neither so large nor so flaring as most of the others, and her simple white frock enveloped her with modesty most befitting. Harmon did not know that the simplicity of that frock was in inverse ratio to its value measured in gold ducats.

"I—I beg pardon—" she began hesitatingly.

Off came his hat as he bowed with deference.

"It's so stupid—so perfectly silly!" she said, laughing in spite of efforts to be serious, her ears and her round young throat becoming a deeper pink. "But I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to help me—if you would be so good?"

The little note of appeal in her voice, as well as the mixture of appeal and merriment in her eyes, caused a curious sensation to sweep over Harmon. It began somewhere in the vicinity of his heart, and flashed like lightning through his entire being.

"Why, of course!" he replied. "Pray command me. My name is Harmon, a cousin of Mrs. Curtis's."

She bowed her acknowledgment. "My skirt is caught in this garden seat, and I can't quite reach it. And you are the first person who has come near—"

By this time Harmon was down on his knees. He gave a gentle tug and stood up again, blushing like a schoolboy. "And now," he said boldly, "as a reward, may I stay here?"

She shot a glance of pleased surprise at him. "It would double my obligation to you; especially if you would get me an ice. It looks so refreshing, and I haven't had any as yet."

"Remember," he laughed, as he turned toward one of the tables, "the garden seat is reserved."

"Yes—and fully paid for in advance."

**FROM** time to time during the next forty-five minutes Constance, going from group to group of her guests, noticed with increasing astonishment that Cousin Bert and his new acquaintance remained alone on the garden seat, which was off to one side of the lawn. She grew a

little provoked too; for she had told the girl about him, and had made her promise to be nice to him. But that was no reason why she should absolutely monopolize him.

Harmon, meanwhile, was blissfully unconscious of everything except that he had beside him a really charming girl. They were chatting away in the most friendly manner upon a score of different topics, when suddenly she exclaimed:

"Oh, I forgot to introduce myself, didn't I? I am Miss Chapin."

The name, he said to himself, suited her precisely. Miss Chapin,—good, old Massachusetts family, that, noted for its fine women, and the male line were bankers, statesmen, railroad officials. What a howling wilderness lay between this girl, whose very atmosphere suggested a dainty Dresden shepherdess, and the rough-and-tumble creature whom he momentarily expected to see blowing in upon that scene, part and parcel of the Dakota cyclone she would undoubtedly bring with her!

It was not long afterward when Constance, warily keeping one eye on Cousin Bert and his new acquaintance, saw them deliberately walk away from the lawn, down the lane past the big red barns, and disappear in the shadow of the hill, beyond which lay deep, romantic woods.

As the last of the guests rolled out through the gateway Constance approached her husband, who was standing near.

He smiled indulgently as she came up to him. "I must say," he remarked, "that it wasn't so bad, after all. Really, my dear, it was a successful afternoon, and you are to be congrat—"

"Do you know where Cousin Bert is," she demanded, "and Mary Chapin?"

"Why—no," he said. "Do you?"

"They've gone off alone, mooning in the woods!"

There was something tragic in her attitude; her words reminded him of cut steel. For a moment he said nothing. Then he sat down on the terrace; and when Constance turned and strode into the house she left him swaying back and forth in joy unconfined.

**IT** was an hour later, just before eight o'clock, when Miss Chapin and Harmon returned to the house. He was carrying a walking stick he had cut in the woods, and she bore in one arm a mass of wild flowers, which accentuated her picturesqueness.

"See what I've brought you!" she cried, holding up the blossoms with childish delight.

"Yes," Harmon added, "and we could have been back an hour ago if we hadn't stopped to pick them. Found 'em on top of the hill just beyond the house on our way home."

Constance glanced at him pityingly. No woman would be silly enough to call attention to their escapade by apologetic explanations. "They are pretty," she said. "Shall I put them in water? Dinner will be served in a few minutes."

"Funny," Harmon remarked, sitting down by Curtis

while Miss Chapin and Constance went indoors, "but until just now I didn't feel a bit hungry. Lounged around for hours doing nothing, and at present I could relish dog biscuit."

"Oh, they're not so bad: it's according to circumstances. Say, where did you take Miss Chapin?"

"Oh, we sat down for awhile by the brook back there. I was afraid she'd be late in starting home; but she explained that Constance wanted her to spend the night here."

"That's good," said Curtis. "And is she going to?"

Harmon nodded. Then he leaned toward his host and asked in an anxious whisper, "Has—has the other one got here yet?"

"Who?"

"You know—the ranchman's daughter—Connie's Dakota friend."

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at. The only Dakota girl we expect here this season is Mary Chapin. Didn't you understand that?"

Harmon shook his head. He was incapable of speech at the moment.

Just then a servant brought tidings of dinner.

Constance had placed the wild flowers on the table directly in front of Miss Chapin, as a reminder of the enormity of her offense and as a distinct rebuke to her, but the effort was lost.

"I knew you'd like them, Connie," Harmon said with a happy smile, "and if Miss Chapin doesn't mind we'll gather some fresh ones for you tomorrow."

"There's nothing I should enjoy more," Miss Chapin promptly replied.

She had felt a little chill in her hostess' vicinity from the moment she and Harmon returned from their stroll. If Constance wasn't so absurd about some things, she would remember that she had fairly urged her to be nice to this bachelor cousin, and to do all she could to make his little visit really enjoyable.

Curtis looked up. "Why not get some this evening?" he suggested eagerly. "There's a lot of vases and bowls to be filled, and you could pick 'em easy as not in the moonlight."

"It's not pleasant to pick flowers in such heavy dew as we're having these nights," Constance interposed pointedly.

The matter was not referred to again until they had spent an hour after dinner watching the young moon and the deep, star-set sky; when Harmon, walking to the edge of the steps, gazed intently down the curving road beyond the open gate. Then he turned, picked up a wrap, and handed it to the young girl sitting nearby.

"Better put it on," he said, and calmly added to the others, "Miss Chapin and I are going for a stroll—as far as the turn in the road, anyhow."

She took the wrap and followed him down the steps. Then the thick hedge bordering the road hid them from view.

Curtis, to be still more comfortable, leaned farther back in his chair and crossed one foot over the other.

"Did you ever see her equal?" Constance demanded